

Electrofishing

Fisheries Biologist In Action

When you go fishing how do you catch fish? Most likely you use a fishing rod and reel, but can you think of other ways that you could catch fish? Sometimes people use nets or even traps to catch fish, but have you ever heard of people using electricity to catch fish? That's right I said electricity! How could you use electricity to catch fish?

It is called electrofishing, when you use electricity to catch fish. Instead of using a fishing rod, biologists use an electrical generator to catch fish. The generator can be either worn as a backpack, for use in shallow water like streams and creeks or an electrical generator can be mounted on a specially designed boat to catch fish in deeper rivers and lakes.



The electrical generator is wired to poles that are submerged into the water to generate a weak electrical field. The electrical field stuns the fish temporarily, and the fish float up to the surface of the water. Once at the surface a biologist can easily dip the fish out of the water and the fish can be identified, measured and weighed. Then the fish can be placed back into the water and safely swim away, since the fish is only temporarily stunned. This allows scientist to collect important information about individual fish and populations of fish without harming the fish. The information collected can help agencies, like the District of Columbia's Fisheries and Wildlife Division, to make critical fisheries management decisions.

Some people worry about fish being hurt by the electricity. However, when the equipment is used by properly trained biologists it is quite safe. Biologists are trained to use just enough electricity to hold the fish for examination, after which the fish can swim away unharmed.



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